BEST PRACTICES IN EVALUATING AND IMPROVING SCHOOL CLIMATE

In the following report, Hanover Research identifies common definitions and dimensions of school climate, and discusses best practices related to school climate evaluation and improvement.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

While research consistently finds that supportive, positive, and safe school environments enable effective teaching and learning, the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) notes that many schools struggle to create and maintain such learning environments.[1] To address this challenge in California, the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) State Priority 6 requires districts to actively measure and set goals related to school climate. These measures and goals should be based on student suspension rates, expulsion rates, and "other local measures, including surveys of pupils, parents, and teachers on the sense of safety and school connectedness."[2]

To support California and other U.S. public school district efforts in improving school climate, Hanover Research (Hanover) examines research literature related to defining, assessing, and improving school climate. Specifically, the report includes the following sections:

- **Section I: Understanding School Climate** presents common definitions and dimensions of school climate, and discusses research on the links between school climate and student outcomes.

- **Section II: Evaluating School Climate** discusses common school climate measures, with a particular focus on school climate surveys. Additionally, Hanover compares metrics and goals from the LCAPs of six selected districts.

- **Section III: Improving School Climate** identifies standards, best practices, and improvement strategies related to school climate.

KEY FINDINGS

UNDERSTANDING SCHOOL CLIMATE

- **Absent national norms in defining school climate, district and school leaders need to agree on a locally-relevant and research-based definition before initiating efforts to measure and/or improve school climate.** The broadly-adopted National School Climate Center (NSCC) definition states that school climate is the "quality and character of school life," which is "based on patterns of students', parents' and school personnel's experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures."[3]

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[1] "Guiding Principles: A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline." U.S. Department of Education, 2014, p. 2. http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/guiding-principles.pdf

[2] "Eight State Priorities - California School Boards Association." Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2013. https://www.csba.org/GovernanceAndPolicyResources/FairFunding/~/media/CSBA/Files/GovernanceResources/GovernanceBriefs/2013_08_LCFF_Fact_Sheet-funding_priority.ashx

[3] "School Climate." National School Climate Center. http://www.schoolclimate.org/climate/

■ **NSCC highlights four essential dimensions of school climate: safety, teaching and learning, interpersonal relationships, and institutional environment***.* These dimensions all relate directly to student perception of school climate. In addition, NSCC considers school leadership and professional relationships as a staff-specific dimension of school climate, and adds a separate dimension focused wholly on social media use to acknowledge the prevalence of digital communication and its impact on students and the school climate.

■ **Supportive school climates are associated with positive student outcomes, including those related to student achievement, graduation and disciplinary rates, and child/youth development**. Research notes that a positive school climate motivates students to learn, mitigates the negative effects of socioeconomic background on academic achievement, and decreases bullying, harassment, and general violent behavior. However, despite the consensus over a connection between school climate and student achievement, research cannot confirm a causal relationship between them.

EVALUATING SCHOOL CLIMATE

■ **Experts recommend that schools use research-based, field-tested surveys to assess school climate, as part of a multi-method evaluation framework.** While researchers stress the importance of using multiple measures (e.g., focus groups, discipline data, and observations), schools typically use surveys to gauge student, staff, and/or parent perceptions about selected aspects of school climate. The majority of school climate surveys take about 15 to 30 minutes to complete, contain from 40 to 80 question items (fewer for younger students), and use Likert scale questions to rate different dimensions of school climate.

■ **Secondary literature consistently highlights the Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI) as an effective measure of school climate for multiple grade levels and respondent groups**. The CSCI, a series of surveys developed by NSCC, measures various aspects of school climate and includes survey instruments designed for students, staff, parents, and community members. Other recommended surveys for measuring school climate include the School Climate Assessment Instrument (SCAI) and the California School Climate, Health, and Learning Survey (CAL-SCHLS) System.

■ **All California districts include goals related to suspension and expulsion rates in their LCAPs, but their specific goals and local measures of school climate tend to vary.** For example, from an examination of the LCAPs of six selected districts in California, district goals related to suspension rates vary from a general goal of decreasing rates to specific goals of maintaining rates at or below a set percentage. Regarding local measures, all six districts mention the use of a student, staff, and/or parent survey and five districts set specific survey participation or response rate goals, some of which increase across years. Moreover, three of these districts specifically note that they use the student survey portion of the CAL-SCHLS.

IMPROVING SCHOOL CLIMATE

- **NSCC recommends that the school climate leadership team establish procedures for using school climate data to set, monitor, and adapt school climate goals and implementation strategies.** The NSCC's five-step, continual school climate improvement process focuses first on the collection and evaluation of climate data, and then on the improvement efforts based on the data reviewed. Data collection and monitoring should include disaggregated disciplinary data that allows schools to monitor disciplinary actions by student subgroup and to address inequalities. Notably, none of the six districts examined includes specific expulsion or suspension goals for student subgroups; however, Corona-Norco Unified School District has goals for reducing the absentee rate of specific student subgroups in its LCAP.

SECTION I: UNDERSTANDING SCHOOL CLIMATE

This section discusses the challenge and importance of defining school climate and its various dimensions, as well as the research connecting school climate with a variety of student outcomes.

DEFINING SCHOOL CLIMATE

Despite a growing focus on school climate over the past three decades, educators, researchers, and policymakers lack consensus on the definition and dimensions of school climate. [4] The National School Climate Center (NSCC), the Center for Educational Measurement and Evaluation (CEME), and the American Institute for Research (AIR) all agree that school climate is the "quality and character of school life."[5] NSCC, whose definition of school climate has been adopted by many researchers, further states that school climate is "based on patterns of students', parents' and school personnel's experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures."[6] Still, this definition is both broad and necessarily vague, as school climate represents an abstract and qualitative concept.

Educators and evaluators need to agree on a research-based definition of school climate before initiating efforts to measure and/or improve school climate in a particular setting.[7] To guide educators within the state, the California Department of Education (CDE) provides the following description of school climate as part of the Quality Schooling Framework:[8]

> School culture and climate are formed by a range of factors that shape students' perceptions of school and their motivation to learn. These factors include the physical, social, and emotional aspects of the school that support meaningful teaching and learning. These environmental factors affect all school experiences, attitudes, behaviors, and the performance of both students and staff.

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[4] [1] Thapa, A. et al. "A Review of School Climate Research." *Review of Educational Research*, 2013. p. 1. http://www.webmail.ijvs.org/files/Publications/A%20Review%20of%20School%20Climate%20Research.pdf [2] "School Climate," Op. cit.

[5] [1] "School Climate," Op. cit. [2] Olsen, J. et al. "A Review and Analysis of School Climate Measures for School Counseling Professionals." The Center for Educational Measurement and Evaluation, 2015. pp. 5–6. http://ceme.uncc.edu/sites/ceme.uncc.edu/files/media/Olsen_0.pdf [3] Clifford, M. et al. "Measuring School Climate for Gauging Principal Performance." American Institutes for Research, 2012. p. 3. http://www.air.org/sites/default/files/downloads/report/school_climate2_0.pdf

[6] [1] "The School Climate Challenge: Narrowing the Gap Between School Climate Research and School Climate Policy, Practice Guidelines and Teacher Education Policy." Center for Social and Emotional Education (CSEE) and National Center for Learning and Citizenship (NCLC) at Education Commission of the States (ECS). p. 5. http://www.schoolclimate.org/climate/documents/school-climate-challenge.pdf

[2] "School Climate," Op. cit.

[7] "The School Climate Challenge: Narrowing the Gap Between School Climate Research and School Climate Policy, Practice Guidelines and Teacher Education Policy," Op. cit., p. 7.

[8] Quoted verbatim from "Definition" tab from: "Culture and Climate." California Department of Education. http://www.cde.ca.gov/qs/cc/index.asp

While educators have used the terms "climate," "culture," and "context" interchangeably, researchers note that these terms have different, if related, meanings. As opposed to *climate*, which relates to the quality and characteristics of school life, the AIR defines *culture* as "shared beliefs, customs, and behaviors [representing] people's experiences with ceremonies, beliefs, attitudes, history, ideology, language, practices, rituals, traditions, and values." Meanwhile, *Context*, which interacts with school climate and culture, "is the conditions surrounding schools," according to the AIR. While climate, culture, and context may all be measured, none of the terms has universally agreed upon dimensions.[9]

A positive, supportive school climate promotes healthy youth development and learning, and includes norms, values, and expectations that support people socially, emotionally, and physically. Following its definition of school climate, the CDE states that, "a healthy and positive school culture means that all students experience supportive learning conditions and opportunities that promote achievement and prepare them to succeed in college, career, and adulthood."[10] More specifically, NSCC, the Center for Social and Emotional Education (CSEE), and the National Center for Learning and Citizenship (NCLC) all highlight the broad characteristics of a positive school climate, as listed in Figure 1.1, that foster the "youth development and learning necessary for a productive, contributing and satisfying life in a democratic society."[11]

Figure 1.1: Broad Characteristics of a Positive School Climate

- Norms, values, and expectations that make people feel socially, emotionally, and physically safe.
- People are engaged and respected.
- Students, families, and educators work together to develop, live, and contribute to a shared school vision.
- Educators model and nurture attitudes that emphasize the benefits and satisfaction gained from learning.
- Each person contributes to the operations of the school and the care of the physical environment.

Source: National School Climate Center[12]

DIMENSIONS OF SCHOOL CLIMATE

NSCC identifies four essential dimensions of school climate: safety, teaching and learning, interpersonal relationships, and institutional environment (Figure 1.2). As with the definition of school climate, NSCC notes that there is no national consensus on the specific dimensions of school climate.[13] These dimensions of school climate all relate directly to student perception of school climate. Additionally, NSCC identifies school leadership and professional relationships as a staff-specific dimension of school climate, and adds a separate

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[9] Clifford et al., Op. cit., p. 3.

[10] From "Definition" tab: "Culture and Climate," Op. cit.

[11] [1] "The School Climate Challenge: Narrowing the Gap Between School Climate Research and School Climate Policy, Practice Guidelines and Teacher Education Policy," Op. cit., p. 5. [2] "School Climate," Op. cit.

[12] Figure bullets quoted verbatim from: "School Climate," Op. cit.

[13] Ibid.

dimension focused wholly on social media use to acknowledge the prevalence of digital communication and its impact on students and the school climate.[14]

Figure 1.2: NSCC Dimensions of School Climate

Safety	Teaching and Learning	Interpersonal Relationships	Insitutional Environment
•Rules and Norms •Sense of Physical Security •Sense of Social-Emotional Security	•Support for Learning •Social and Civic Learning	•Respect for Diversity •Social Support (Adults) •Social Support (Students)	•School Connectedness/ Engagement •Physical Surroundings

Source: National School Climate Center[15]

Other researchers describe school climate within physical, social, and academic dimensions. A 2007 article published in *Leadership Compass*, a National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) journal no longer in circulation, notes that student perception of a school (e.g., "friendly, inviting, and supportive" or "exclusionary, unwelcoming, and even unsafe") depends on the school climate that includes the following three dimensions.[16]

Figure 1.3: Physical, Social, and Academic Dimensions of School Climate (NAESP)

DIMENSION	COMPONENTS
Physical	▪ Appearance of the school building and its classrooms ▪ School size and ratio of students to teachers in the classroom ▪ Order and organization of classrooms in the school ▪ Availability of resources ▪ Safety and comfort
Social	▪ Quality of interpersonal relationships between and among students, teachers, and staff ▪ Equitable and fair treatment of students by teachers and staff ▪ Degree of competition and social comparison between students ▪ Degree to which students, teachers, and staff contribute to decision-making at the school
Academic	▪ Quality of instruction ▪ Teacher expectations for student achievement ▪ Monitoring student progress and promptly reporting results to students and parents.

Source: Leadership Compass[17]

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[14] "The 13 Dimensions of School Climate Measured by the CSCI." National School Climate Center.
http://www.schoolclimate.org/programs/documents/CSCIv4.2_dimensions_chart_pagebars.pdf
[15] Figure content adapted from: "The 12 Dimensions of School Climate Measured." National School Climate Center.
http://www.schoolclimate.org/programs/documents/dimensions_chart_pagebars.pdf
[16] Loukas, A. "What Is School Climate." *Leadership Compass*, 5:1, Fall 2007. p. 1.
http://www.naesp.org/resources/2/Leadership_Compass/2007/LC2007v5n1a4.pdf
[17] Figure bullets quoted verbatim from: Ibid.

Peer relationships, students' sense of safety and security, and school disciplinary policies and practices contribute to creating a positive school climate.[18] Based on the existing research linking these characteristics to "a range of positive student outcomes, including school attendance, learning motivation, grades, test scores, and graduation," the CDE identifies eight unique characteristics of school culture and climate, presented in Figure 1.4, below, along with a description of how each of the characteristics manifests within a positive school climate.

Figure 1.4: Characteristics of School Climate and Culture Identified by the CDE

CHARACTERISTIC	MANIFESTATION OF CHARACTERISTIC IN A POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE
Safety and discipline	▪ Safe schools provide orderly, civil conditions for learning. Schools that are safe places to learn provide protection from physical and psychological violence and freedom from bullying and harassment. A growing body of research has identified harassment-related distress as a key factor in poor school attendance and poor student performance.
Equity and respect for diversity	▪ Schools embrace the diversity of the students they serve, respecting them regardless of differences in socioeconomic status, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation. All students, regardless of their individual characteristics, receive personalized support and equal opportunities to participate in classroom and school activities.
Developmental support	▪ Schools provide students with a sense of belonging evidenced by caring and respect; encourage students to grow in competence by offering balanced, challenging tasks; and support students to realize their potential. Schools are growth-oriented, with a clear and consistent focus on student success where individual learning for students and staff is promoted.
Relationships	▪ Schools are characterized by positive and trusting relationships among students, staff, and parents. These relationships are the key to student's identification with a school community, student motivation, classroom management, and, ultimately, academic performance.
High expectations	▪ Schools are staffed by teachers and administrators who communicate high expectations for student success, and who clearly demonstrate their willingness to help students achieve.
Positive professional relationships	▪ Schools with effective leaders help create a positive organizational culture and climate by treating all members of the school community with respect—without regard to professional status or position. They invite a broad range of community participants to the school.

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[18] From "Definition" tab: "Culture and Climate," Op. cit.

CHARACTERISTIC	MANIFESTATION OF CHARACTERISTIC IN A POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE
Web of supports	Schools provide a comprehensive web of supports for students, teachers, and parents to be engaged in education and ensure that all students succeed. This includes addressing barriers to learning that challenge many students, including health, social, emotional, behavioral, and learning barriers. ▪ *Participation and student engagement:* Schools provide students opportunities for meaningful participation in activities and decision-making throughout the school and in each classroom. All students and teachers have a voice and a sense of responsibility that fosters community and engagement. ▪ *Family and community engagement:* Schools purposefully foster family engagement in their students' education and school-community collaboration in addressing barriers to student learning.
Physical health	▪ Schools provide opportunities for all students to engage in physical activity and make healthy dietary choices. A growing body of research indicates that improvements in physical activity and nutrition have a positive impact on student achievement.

Source: California Department of Education[19]

SCHOOL CLIMATE AND STUDENT OUTCOMES

Research consistently finds that sustained positive school climates are associated with a variety of positive student outcomes, including those related to child and youth development, risk prevention and health promotion, student learning and academic achievement, graduation rate improvement, and teacher retention.[20] In a 2013 brief, NSCC highlights the fundamental rationale behind focusing on positive school climate, noting that "when children feel safe, supported, and engaged, they are better able to learn and are more fully equipped with the skills they need to succeed in school and beyond."[21] In addition, a 2013 integrative review on school climate research published in the *Review of Educational Research* concludes that a positive school climate means:[22]

> "(a) having a powerful influence on the motivation to learn; (b) mitigating the negative impact of the socioeconomic context on academic success; (c) contributing to less aggression and violence, less harassment, and less sexual harassment; and (d) acting as a protective factor for the learning and positive life development of young people."

Figure 1.5 below summarizes the specific positive student outcomes related to physical and mental health, as well as academic achievement, that have been connected with supportive school climates in the existing research.

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[19] Figure text quoted verbatim from "Characteristics" tab: Ibid.

[20] Thapa et al., Op. cit., p. 13.

[21] Faster, D. and D. Lopez. "School Climate Measurement and Analysis." National School Climate Center, 2013. p. 1.
http://www.schoolclimate.org/publications/documents/sc-brief-measurement.pdf

[22] Quoted verbatim from: Thapa et al., Op. cit., pp. 3–4.

Figure 1.5: Positive Outcomes Connected with Supportive School Climates

OUTCOME AREA	SPECIFIC OUTCOMES
Physical and Mental Health	Extensive research finds that school climate has positive effects on a range of factors: self-esteem, self-concept, self-criticism, substance abuse and psychiatric problems, and student absenteeism and suspension in middle and high school. Research additionally indicates that students at school that systematically follow threat assessment guidelines "reported less bullying, felt more comfortable seeking help, and possessed more positive perceptions of school climate. In addition, these schools had fewer long-term suspensions."
Academic Achievement	A number of studies over the past 40 years have noted positive correlations between school climate and student achievement at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. A positive school climate also "promotes cooperative learning, group cohesion, respect, and mutual trust. These particular aspects have been shown to directly improve the learning environment."

Source: Review of Educational Research[23]

Specifically, studies of California middle and high school students find strong correlations between student achievement and positive school climates. For example, a study published by WestEd (and highlighted by the CDE[24]) organizes a sample of 1,715 California middle and high schools into the following three groups:[25]

- Those that performed much better across multiple years than their student characteristics would predict, referred to as beating-the-odds (BTO) schools;

- Those that performed much worse than would be predicted over multiple years, referred to as chronically underperforming (CU) schools; and

- Other secondary schools.

The study found that the 40 schools classified as BTO schools (2.4 percent of the sample) "had substantially more positive school climates than both the 20 CU schools (1.2 percent) and all other secondary schools (96.4 percent)." In comparison to the other secondary schools that had, on average, climate scores at the 49th percentile, BTO schools had climate scores at the 82nd percentile, doubling the average scores of CU schools.[26]

Despite the "impressive consensus" regarding a connection between school climate and student achievement, research cannot confirm a causal relationship between them. For example, a 2016 study published in *Educational Researcher* reviewed a sample of over 3,000 California middle and high school students, drawing data from the California Health Kids Survey (CHKS) for the academic years 2007-09, 2009-11, and 2011-13. The authors hypothesized that improvements in school climate and/or reductions in violence would lead to improved school performance. However, while the study identified academic performance

[23] Ibid., pp. 3–10.
[24] See "Resources" tab: "Culture and Climate," Op. cit.
[25] Quoted verbatim from: Voight, A., G. Austin, and T. Hanson. "Climate for Success: How a School Climate Distinguishes Schools That Are Beating the Achievement Odds (Report Summary)." WestEd, 2013. pp. 1–2. https://www.wested.org/online_pubs/hd-13-01.pdf
[26] Ibid.

improvement as a central causal factor in reducing violence and enhancing school climate, it did not find the reverse causality.[27]

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[27] Benbenishty, R. et al. "Testing the Causal Links between School Climate, School Violence, and School Academic Performance: A Cross-Lagged Panel Autoregressive Model." *Educational Researcher*, 45:3, April 2016. p. 197. http://edr.sagepub.com/content/45/3/197.full.pdf

SECTION II: EVALUATING SCHOOL CLIMATE

This section first provides an overview of the various local measures of school climate and then continues to discuss school climate surveys specifically. Hanover lists recommendations to guide the adoption of school climate surveys, highlights three recommended survey instruments, and identifies the measures and goals related to school climate as described in the LCAPs of six selected districts in California.

OVERVIEW

According to NSCC, "**a comprehensive assessment of school climate includes major spheres of school life such as safety, relationships, teaching and learning, and the environment as well as larger organizational patterns** (e.g. from fragmented to shared; healthy or unhealthy)."[28] However, experts note that there is no consensus over which dimensions of school climate that schools can and should assess.[29] To gain a comprehensive view of school climate and its various aspects, the Colorado Education Initiative (CEI), an education-focused nonprofit that collaborates with the Colorado Department of Education and school districts across the state, recommends that schools use multiple measures to measure school climate when possible.[30] While school climate surveys assess student, staff, and community perceptions of school climate, they do not provide "staff or student data regarding climate outcome indicators" (e.g., attendance, suspension, and office discipline rates).[31] Figure 2.1 below outlines the various potential measures of school climate identified by the CEI and other experts.

Figure 2.1: Potential Measures of School Climate

▪ Focus groups	▪ Study circles	▪ Student, staff, and family surveys
▪ Observational methods	▪ Participatory action research	▪ Incidence data (e.g., School-Wide Information System (SWIS) or Infinite Campus (IC) data)
▪ Interviews	▪ Hot-spot mapping to determine frequency and location of incidences	
▪ Town hall discussions		

Source: Colorado Education Initiative and Educational Leadership[32]

School counselors are often the staff members appointed to improve and evaluate school climate. The CEME notes that, due to school counselors' unique skills and training, "their school-wide focus on supporting all students' academic and personal/social development within a safe environment," and their frequent collaboration with various school staff, parents, and community members, they are often responsible for improving and evaluating

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[28] "School Climate," Op. cit.

[29] Thapa et al., Op. cit., p. 2.

[30] "Measuring School Climate: A Toolkit for Districts and Schools." Colorado Education Initiative, 2012. p. 4. http://www.coloradoedinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Measuring-School-Climate-Toolkit.pdf

[31] Ibid., p. 10.

[32] Figure bullets adapted from: [1]Ibid., p. 4. [2] Cohen, J., T. Pickeral, and M. McCloskey. "The Challenge of Assessing School Climate." *Educational Leadership*, 66:4, December 2008. http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/dec08/vol66/num04/The-Challenge-of-Assessing-School-Climate.aspx

school climate. [33] Specific counselor responsibilities and roles that contribute to the evaluation of school climate, as well as the promotion of a *positive* school climate, include "leadership of building-level teams; collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data; designing and implementing prevention and intervention strategies; supporting teachers through collaboration and consultation; and coordinating with community agencies to access resources."[34]

SCHOOL CLIMATE SURVEYS

Despite the recommendation of using multiple measures that provide different types of data, researchers often focus on the importance of student, staff, parent, and community surveys in assessing school climate. For example, based on a comprehensive review of school climate measures, the CEME found that most schools used surveys to gauge student, staff, and/or parent perceptions of select aspects of school climate.[35] With regard to the efficacy of school climate surveys, the authors of a 2008 *Educational Leadership* article note the following:[36]

> School climate is best evaluated with surveys that have been developed in a scientifically sound manner and are comprehensive in two ways: (1) recognizing student, parent, and school personnel voice and (2) assessing all the dimensions that color and shape the process of teaching and learning and educators' and students' experiences in the school building.

According to the CEME, **school climate surveys typically take from 15 to 30 minutes to complete and are most often directed at students, parents, and teachers.** Most climate surveys contain 40 to 80 question items, but fewer items are typically included for surveys designed for elementary school students. Younger students may take surveys that use pictures rather than words ("e.g., very sad face, sad face, neutral face, happy face, very happy face") to form a Likert scale, a common type of question on climate surveys. Schools administer climate surveys in both pencil-and-paper and electronic formats, and may include administrators and other school staff in addition to students, parents, and teachers.[37] When searching for a tool to measure school climate, the CEME recommends that school counselors and/or other school leadership consider the following questions listed in Figure 2.2.

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[33] Olsen et al., Op. cit., p. 9.
[34] Ibid., p. 4.
[35] Ibid., pp. 9–10.
[36] Quoted verbatim from: Cohen, Pickeral, and McCloskey, Op. cit.
[37] Olsen et al., Op. cit., p. 10.

Figure 2.2: Considerations for Choosing a School Climate Measure

- What aspects of school climate are we interested in and what is the best indicator of those aspects?
- Whose perspective do we want to assess (e.g., students, school staff, parents, community) and who will collect, analyze, and summarize the data?
- What usability characteristics (e.g., time to administer, frequency of use, format of assessment, language needs, technical adequacy) of a school climate measure are most important to document?
- What resources will we need to administer the school climate measures (e.g., amount of funding, support provided by authors, administration, scoring, and reporting considerations)?
- How will the results be used to positively impact the school and who will be responsible for making this happen?

Source: Center for Educational Measurement and Evaluation[38]

Similarly, in a 2013 report, NSCC identifies a series of characteristics related to effective school climate measures that emphasize potential ways to achieve rigor and validity, as demonstrated in Figure 2.3.

Figure 2.3: Characteristics of Effective School Climate Measures

CHARACTERISTIC	DESCRIPTION
A strong research base	An effective school climate assessment tool will have well-established reliability and validity, with additional external confirmation of its strength through third-party evaluators and research studies.
Vigorously field-tested	It is essential that the assessment tool has a strong track record across multiple settings, have a longstanding history, and have undergone a process of refinement and revision to keep the tool current with the latest research in the field.
Measures core populations	School climate assessment tools ideally assess all stakeholder groups, in order to fully represent a comprehensive profile of each school's particular climate. The core stakeholder groups include students, parents/ guardians, all school personnel (administrators, educators, certified and non-certified staff), and potentially the wider community, if possible.
Easy to administer	It is ideal to have a tool that is easy to administer, offers multiple options for distribution (i.e. paper and online), and takes approximately 15-20 minutes to complete for most populations to achieve the highest possible response rates.
Additional features	It is important to consider the needs of your particular community when choosing a school climate assessment tool. For instance, does the tool come in the predominant languages used by your parent and/or student populations? Is it possible to customize aspects of the tool to measure particular sub-groups that are significant to your community? What type of reporting is provided, and how quickly will it be provided to you? Exploring these types of questions with your leadership team prior to choosing a tool can help ensure that the school climate assessment process provides beneficial data that supports a process of lasting, whole-school improvement.

Source: National School Climate Center[39]

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[38] Figure bullets quoted verbatim from: Ibid., p. 25.
[39] Figure text quoted verbatim from: Faster and Lopez, Op. cit., pp. 2–3.

Particularly, NSCC recommends a minimum parent participation rate of 30 to 40 percent to validate survey findings on school climate. To increase parent participation, NSCC highlights the experience of Windsor Public Schools in Connecticut, which conducted the Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI) Survey to assess areas related to school climate improvement. With an initial parent response rate of below 10 percent, the district scheduled survey follow-up meetings to present the results from the limited survey data to different stakeholder groups and to stress the importance of increased parent involvement. To improve response rates, it coordinated to launch a second round of surveys around parent-teacher conferences, used school communications more consistently to spread awareness, entered all parents who completed the survey in a raffle, and added a Spanish language survey version. As a result, parent participation increased to 73 percent at two elementary schools and "by more than 4x at the middle school level."[40]

RECOMMENDED SCHOOL CLIMATE SURVEYS

Researchers and educators have access to a large number of surveys and tools designed to measure different aspects of school climate. For example, the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments (NCSSLE) provides a compendium of student, faculty and staff, family, administrator, and community surveys for all grade levels. This compendium, a resource recommended by NSCC, includes only measures that have been tested for validity and reliability. It currently obtains 29 non-federal and 19 federal "survey batteries" for K-12 purposes. For each measure, the NCSSLE provides, when available, a description of the constructs measured, the intended respondents, related reports, a link to the survey instrument, and results from survey administration.[41] In particular, Figure 2.4 below provides an overview of the three surveys included in the NCSSLE compendium that were identified by additional secondary research as suitable for multiple respondent groups across Grades K-12.

Figure 2.4: Recommended School Climate Survey Measures (K-12)

MEASURE	RESPONDENTS	GRADE LEVEL	PUBLICALLY AVAILABLE
Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI)	Students, Staff, Parents/Guardians, Community Members	3-5; 6-12	No
School Climate Assessment Instrument (SCAI)	Students, Teachers and Staff, Parents and Guardians	K-6 (teachers, staff, parents and guardians); 2-6 (students); 7-12 (students, faculty/staff, parents)	Yes, but permission required for use.

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[40] "Windsor Public Schools (WPS): Making School Climate Count." National School Climate Center. pp. 1–2.
http://www.schoolclimate.org/programs/documents/case-5-Windsor-Case-Study-2.pdf

[41] "School Climate Survey Compendia." National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments.
https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/topic-research/school-climate-measurement/school-climate-survey-compendium

MEASURE	RESPONDENTS	GRADE LEVEL	PUBLICALLY AVAILABLE
California School Climate, Health, and Learning Survey (CAL-SCHLS) System	Students, Parents, Staff	5; 7; 9; 11	Yes, but copyright protected.

Source: National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments[42]

COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE INVENTORY (CSCI)

The CSCI, a series of surveys developed by NSCC, is the most frequently highlighted measure of school climate in the secondary literature.[43] Out of 26 examined climate measures, the CEME identified the CSCI as one of four measures deemed suitable for assessing school climate broadly at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.[44] Similarly, in a 2011 study conducted by the Social Development Research Group at the University of Washington, the CSCI was the only recommended measure of school climate, out of 73 examined middle school measures.[45] In a study of 125 school climate measures to gauge principal performance by the AIR, the CSCI was noted as one of only three measures deemed suitable to administer to students, parents, and teachers.[46]

The CSCI includes four surveys tailored to elementary students, middle and high school students, parents, and staff.[47] Based on the dimensions of school climate listed in Figure 1.2, the CEME summarizes the main purposes of climate surveys as to assess (a) safety, (b) teaching and learning, (c) interpersonal relationships, and (d) needs of school.[48] The most recent CSCI version has notably expanded to assess the impact of social media on school climate. The survey package includes 13 dimensions of school climate, takes approximately 20 minutes to complete, and is available online or on paper in both English and Spanish.[49] The CEME notes that the "technical adequacy of the instrument is high with an overall reliability of 0.94 for the elementary version and 0.95 for the middle and high school version."[50] According to NSCC, pricing of the CSCI is based on student enrollment and survey format (i.e., paper or online).[51] The basic package includes online surveys, a school climate portal with online support, a customized report, and action worksheets.

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[42] Figure text adapted from survey-specific pages found listed here: Ibid.

[43] For example, see: [1] Olsen et al., Op. cit. [2] Cohen, Pickeral, and McCloskey, Op. cit. [3] Clifford et al., Op. cit.

[44] Olsen et al., Op. cit., p. 18.

[45] Haggerty, K., J. Elgin, and A. Wooley. "Social-Emotional Learning Assessment Measures for Middle School Youth." Social Development Research Group, University of Washington, 2011. p. 21. http://www.search-institute.org/sites/default/files/a/DAP-Raikes-Foundation-Review.pdf

[46] Clifford et al., Op. cit., pp. 7–10.

[47] "Measuring School Climate (CSCI)." National School Climate Center. http://www.schoolclimate.org/programs/csci.php

[48] Olsen et al., Op. cit., p. 49.

[49] "Measuring School Climate (CSCI)." National School Climate Center. http://www.schoolclimate.org/programs/csci.php

[50] Olsen et al., Op. cit., pp. 18–19.

[51] "Purchasing the CSCI." National School Climate Center. http://www.schoolclimate.org/programs/csci-cost.php

The CSCI tends to rely on Likert scale survey questions to assess various aspects of school climate. For example, sample survey items for elementary school students include "My school tries to get students to join after school activities," "Adults in my school are good examples of how to behave," and "In my school, adults teach me how to show feelings in proper ways." [52] More broadly, the constructs of school climate that the CSCI measures by respondent group are listed in Figure 2.5 below.

Figure 2.5: Constructs of School Climate Measured by Respondent Type (CSCI)

RESPONDENT	CONSTRUCTS MEASURED	
Students	▪ Orderly school environment ▪ Administration provides instructional leadership ▪ Positive learning environment ▪ Parent and community involvement	▪ Instruction is well-developed and implemented ▪ Expectations for students ▪ Collaboration between administration, faculty, and students
Staff	▪ Orderly school environment ▪ Administration provides instructional leadership ▪ Positive learning environment ▪ Parent and community involvement	▪ Instruction is well-developed and implemented ▪ Expectations for students ▪ Collaboration between administration, faculty, and students
Parents	▪ Physical and social bullying ▪ Respect and diversity ▪ Social support – adults (towards each other and towards students) ▪ Student-student relationships	▪ Social and civic learning ▪ Physical surroundings ▪ Rules and norms ▪ Support for learning
Community Members	▪ Physical and social bullying ▪ Respect and diversity ▪ Social support - adults (towards each other and towards students) ▪ Social and civic learning	▪ Physical surroundings ▪ Rules and norms ▪ Student-student relationships ▪ Support for learning ▪ Interest in supporting school's improvement efforts

Source: National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments[53]

SCHOOL CLIMATE ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT (SCAI)

The SCAI includes four survey versions for elementary students, middle and high school students, parents, and school staff. The set of surveys, offered by the Alliance for the Study of School Climate (ASSC), is available online and on paper in English and Spanish, and features from 30 to 79 question items (depending on the respondent type) that take approximately

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[52] "Student Survey Form I: Elementary Students." National School Climate Center. p. 1.
http://www.schoolclimate.org/programs/documents/CSCIv4.2_sample-StudentES.pdf

[53] Figure bullets quoted verbatim from: "Comprehensive School Climate Inventory - Constructs." National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments. https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/survey/comprehensive-school-climate-inventory

20 minutes to complete.[54] The CEME notes that the SCAI has a high reliability rating of 0.97, and its initial pricing includes "set-up, support, license, and service fees, scoring for online administration, data analysis, and reports."[55]

The SCAI surveys are publically accessible through the ASSC website. While the non-student and the secondary student surveys rely on Likert scale questions, the elementary school student survey uses a multiple-choice format. Figure 2.6 below lists three sample questions taken from the SCAI elementary school student survey.
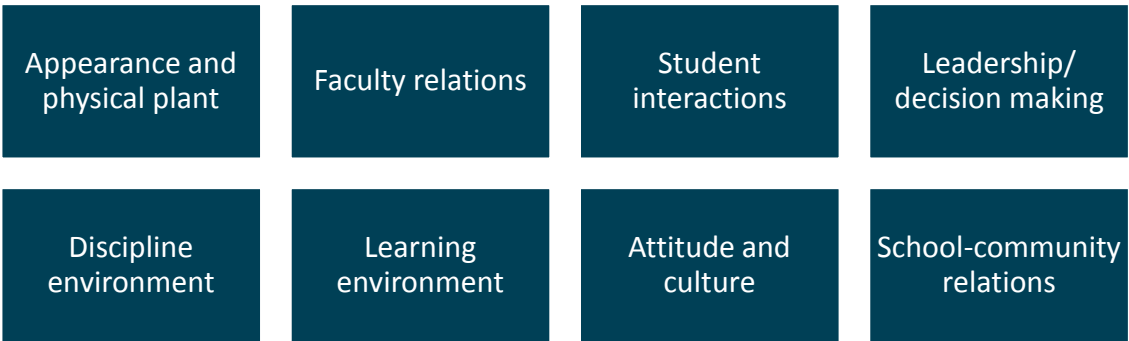
Figure 2.6: SCAI Elementary School Student Survey Sample Questions

1. FROM WHAT I CAN TELL, THIS SCHOOL IS:	2. IN MY EXPERIENCE, AT THIS SCHOOL:	3. WHEN I LOOK AROUND AT THIS SCHOOL I SEE:
a. A great place for people to visit b. An okay place for people to visit. c. Not a place people want to visit.	a. Everything works, or gets fixed quickly b. A few things are broken, but mostly things here work. c. A lot of things are broken.	a. Lots of color and kids' work is up everywhere b. Some color and kids' work is up in some places. c. Mostly blank walls.

Source: Alliance for the Study of School Climate[56]

Similar to the CSCI, the SCAI is a comprehensive assessment of school climate, rather than an assessment focused on a single dimension of school climate. Figure 2.7 below outlines the eight dimensions of school climate measured by the SCAI.

Figure 2.7: Dimensions of School Climate Measured by the SCAI

Appearance and physical plant	Faculty relations	Student interactions	Leadership/ decision making
Discipline environment	Learning environment	Attitude and culture	School-community relations

Source: Center for Educational Measurement and Evaluation[57]

CALIFORNIA SCHOOL CLIMATE, HEALTH, AND LEARNING SURVEY

The California School Climate, Health, and Learning Survey (CAL-SCHLS) System was developed by WestEd for the CDE, and is customizable to meet school-specific needs.[58] The

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[54] [1] "ASSC Assessment." Alliance for the Study of School Climate. http://web.calstatela.edu/centers/schoolclimate/assessment/ [2] Olsen et al., Op. cit., p. 19.

[55] Olsen et al., Op. cit., p. 19.

[56] Figure text quoted verbatim from: "SCAI Elementary School Student Survey." Alliance for the Study of School Climate. http://web.calstatela.edu/centers/schoolclimate/assessment/ASSC_SCAI-E-S_v3.2.pdf

[57] Olsen et al., Op. cit., pp. 49–50.

[58] "Welcome to the Cal-SCHLS System Website." WestEd. http://cal-schls.wested.org/

CAL-SCHLS is comprised of three interrelated surveys: (1) the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS), (2) the California School Staff Survey (CSSS), and (3) the California School Parent Survey (CSPS).[59] The survey system, which is used by a number of districts in California (see the following subsection), offers surveys on paper and online in English and Spanish for students, and surveys in 25 different languages for parents.

The CHKS consist of 65 to 112 question items depending on the grade level, while the CSSS consists of 79 question items and the CSPS consists of 39 question items. The survey system is not publically available, and the pricing, which is based on district size, is lower for California districts and includes a variety of reports, datasets, and other materials to help schools understand and act on survey findings.[60]

The CAL-SCHLS aims to measure the following dimensions of school climate: (a) health risks (e.g., alcohol, tobacco and other drug use); (b) school violence, (c) physical health, (d) resilience and youth development, and (e) school climate.[61] Figure 2.8 below presents the specific constructs of school climate measured by the CAL-SCHLS, as identified by the NCSSLE.

Figure 2.8: Measured Constructs of School Climate (CAL-SCHLS)

- School connectedness
- School supports (caring relationships, high expectations, opportunities for meaningful participation)
- Community supports (caring relationships, high expectations, opportunities for meaningful participation)
- Self-awareness

- Tobacco, alcohol, or drug use at school
- Physical/verbal/emotional violence victimization
- Physical/verbal/emotional violence perpetration
- Harassment victimization
- Peer supports (caring relationships, high expectations)

- Home supports (caring relationships, high expectations, opportunities for meaningful participation)
- Problem solving
- Self-efficacy
- Cooperation and communication
- Empathy

Source: National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments[62]

COMMON LCAP METRICS AND INDICATORS

All California districts set goals for suspension and expulsion rates and report these rates in their LCAPs; however, district specific goals and their additional local measures of school climate vary. To determine the specific metrics that some California districts use to measure school climate, Hanover examined the LCAPs of six selected districts. Based on their 2015-16 and 2016-17 LCAPs, the following patterns emerged:

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[59] Ibid.

[60] Olsen et al., Op. cit., pp. 19–20.

[61] Ibid., p. 50.

[62] Figure bullets quoted verbatim from: "California Healthy Kids Survey – Constructs." National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments. https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/survey/california-healthy-kids-survey

- **Suspension and Expulsion Rates:** All six districts record suspension and expulsion rates and have goals for future rates. However, the specificity of their goals varies, ranging from a general goal of decreasing rates (Capistrano Unified School District) to maintaining rates at or below specific percentages (e.g., San Francisco Unified School District). Goals for subsequent years stay constant for all of these districts.

- **Climate Surveys as a Local Measure**: All six districts mention the use of a student, staff, and/or parent survey, and five of the six districts set specific participation or response rate goals, some of which change for subsequent years. Three districts note specifically that they use the CHKS. As the names do not correspond, it is unclear whether their other climate surveys are part of the CAL-SCHLS system, externally developed surveys, or surveys developed in house.

These districts typically do not include special goals related to improving school climate for minorities and other underserved student subgroups in their LCAPs. While San Francisco Unified School District has a goal of reducing the "disproportionate suspensions of African American and Latino students" and the "rate of out-of-class referrals," the district does list specific, separate percentage goals for these students.[63] Similarly, Corona-Norco Unified School District includes a specific absentee rate goal (reducing the rate by 0.25 to 1.0 percent) for specific student subgroups (Hispanic, English Learners, RFEP, Low Income, Foster Youth, African American, and Special Education), but the district does not set subgroup-specific goals for suspension or expulsion rates.[64]

Figure 2.9 below lists the specific measures and associated goals from the LCAPs of the examined districts. Under the column with the header titled "Local Measures," additional measures of school climate (e.g., surveys) are indicated in bold.

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[63] "Updated Final 2015-16 SFUSD LCAP," Op. cit., p. 39.
[64] "Corona-Norco USD 2016-2019 Local Control Accountability Plan," Op. cit., p. 63.

Figure 2.9: School Climate Measures and Goals of Selected Districts

DISTRICT	SUSPENSION	EXPULSION	LOCAL MEASURES
Corona-Norco Unified School District[65]	Maintain or decrease current rates each year	Maintain or decrease current rates each year	▪ **California School Parent Survey.** Goal of maintaining or increasing the percentage of parents who: ○ Agreed that their school is an inviting place for students to learn ○ Agreed that the school encourages students of all races to enroll in challenging courses ○ Agreed that the school welcomes parent input and contribution
San Francisco Unified School District[66]	Maintain rates at or below 1.5 percent	Maintain rates at 0.0 percent	▪ **Staff Culture and Climate Surveys.** Goal of increasing positive response rates for CORE staff by 3 percent annually. ▪ **Family Culture and Climate Survey**. Expected goals of: ○ Increase by 15 percent annually the number of schools reaching 70 percent completion. ○ Increase by 3 percent annually the district-wide positive responses to the scales for School Program Fit, Welcoming Culture, Respect for Diversity, and Rules and Safety.
Santa Ana Unified School District [67]	Reduce rates to 3.5 percent	Maintain rates at or below 0.1 percent	▪ **Facilities Inspection Tool (FIT).** Goal of all schools meeting the exemplary or good standard ▪ **California Healthy Kids Survey**. Goals of: ○ For 2016-17, increase the percentage of surveyed students who feel safe or very safe at school to 77 percent (Grade 5), 65 percent (Grade 7), 66 percent (Grade 9), 69 percent (Grade 11) and 71 percent (Grade NT). In subsequent years, raise all targets by one percentage point each year. ○ Increase to 90 percent or above the percentage of surveyed parents that agree or strongly agree that school is a safe place for their child. ○ Maintain at 90 percent or above the percentage of staff that indicates that they agree or strongly agree that school is a safe place for students. ▪ **Annual parent survey.** Goal of minimum participation of 11,000 parents.
Capistrano Unified School District [68]	Decrease rates	Decrease rates	▪ **California Health Kids Survey**. 2016-17 LCAP does not include specific goals.

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[65] "Corona-Norco USD 2016-2019 Local Control Accountability Plan." Corona-Norco USD. pp. 63–76. http://www.cnusd.k12.ca.us/cms/lib/CA01001152/Centricity/Domain/20/LCAP%202016.2017%20PDF.pdf

[66] "Updated Final 2015-16 SFUSD LCAP." San Francisco USD, 2015. pp. 39–61. http://www.sfusd.edu/en/about-sfusd/budget/lcff-and-lcap.html

[67] "SAUSD Adopted LCAP 2016-17." Santa Ana Unified School District, 2016. pp. 36-43. https://www.ocde.us/LCAP/Documents/2016-17%20LCAPs/SAUSD_Adopted_LCAP_Final.pdf

[68] "2016-17 Board Approved LCAP - Capistrano USD." Capistrano USD, 2016. pp. 10–12. http://capousd.ca.schoolloop.com/file/1392793917598/1218998864154/5724697814298668962.pdf

DISTRICT	SUSPENSION	EXPULSION	LOCAL MEASURES
Hayward Unified District[69]	Main rates below 4.25 percent	Maintain rates below 0.1 percent	■ **California Health Kids Survey**. Goals of: ○ Increase by 10 percent the percentage of students feeling safe and connected to school ○ (at sites with expanded mental health and counseling supports) Increase by 5 percent the percentage of students feeling connected to school
Long Beach Unified District[70]	Reduce rates to below the state average	Reduce rates to below the state average	■ **School Culture and Climate Survey.** Goal of increasing student, parent, and staff results by at least 1 percent in 2016-17, and by an additional percentage point each year, in comparison with 2015-16 results.

Source: District LCAPs as cited in figure

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[69] "LCAP Plan 2016-2018 - Hayward USD." Hayward USD. pp. 55–63.
https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B9g8Rgw4XiFuR1BoYjRuUkx4eW1PMklDS2Qxazk4cEczc0Rn/view
[70] Long Beach USD LCAP 2016-19. Long Beach USD. http://www.lbschools.net/Asset/Files/Local_Control/2016-19%20LCAP%20Final%20Amended%20Version%20Part%203%20for%20LACOE%20160919%20HL.pdf

SECTION III: IMPROVING SCHOOL CLIMATE

This section of the report highlights recommended standards to support school climate improvement, a process to guide improvement efforts, and other related best practices.

STANDARDS TO SUPPORT SCHOOL CLIMATE IMPROVEMENT

School climate efforts should center on the development, implementation, and continual improvement of the school climate plan. To guide district and school leadership in implementing their school climate improvement initiatives, NCSS developed a framework of five standards and associated benchmark criteria, as displayed in Figure 3.1. While these standards "do not recommend or detail specific assessment, curricular, leadership, professional development, and related systemically informed programs, curricula, or services," the indicators related to each standard may lead district and school efforts for improving school climate.[71]

Figure 3.1: School Climate Standards to Guide Improvement Efforts

STANDARD AREA	STANDARD DESCRIPTION AND INDICATORS
School vision and plan	**The school community has a shared vision and plan for promoting, enhancing, and sustaining a positive school climate.** ▪ School policies and practices support school, family, youth and community members working together to establish a safe and productive learning community; ▪ Schools gather accurate and reliable data about school climate from students; and ▪ Capacity building is developed over time to enable all school community members to meet school climate standards.
School policies	**The school community sets policies specifically promoting (a) the development and sustainability of social, emotional, ethical, civic and intellectual skills, knowledge, dispositions and engagement, and (b) a comprehensive system to address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage students who have become disengaged.** ▪ Policies promote use and monitoring of natural and informal opportunities (e.g., recreational and extracurricular aspects of classroom and school life, formulation of codes of conduct and fair enforcement of rules, mentoring, and informal interactions among and with students) to ensure they support the helpful norms of learning and teaching that foster mutual respect and caring; engagement; safety and well-being; civil, pro social, responsible behavior; and a psychological sense of community. ▪ Policies ensure the operational and capacity building mechanisms (including staff and student development) related to this standard are fully integrated into a school's infrastructure and are effectively implemented and sustained.

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[71] "National School Climate Standards." National School Climate Council. p. 3.
http://www.schoolclimate.org/climate/documents/school-climate-standards.pdf

STANDARD AREA	STANDARD DESCRIPTION AND INDICATORS
School community's practices	**The school community's practices are identified, prioritized and supported to (a) promote the learning and positive social, emotional, ethical and civic development of students, (b) enhance engagement in teaching, learning and school-wide activities; (c) address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage those who have become disengaged; and (d) develop and sustain an appropriate operational infrastructure and capacity building mechanisms for meeting this standard.**
Welcoming and supportive school environment	**The school community creates an environment where all members are welcomed, supported, and feel safe in school: socially, emotionally, intellectually, and physically.** ■ Students, their families, school staff, and community stakeholders are regularly surveyed and are asked to indicate what the school should do to further enhance a welcoming, supportive, and safe environment. ■ School leaders monitor and evaluate the prevention and intervention strategies designed to support people feeling welcomed, supported and safe and use that data to improve relevant policies, practices, facilities, staff competencies, and accountability.
Promoting social and civic responsibilities	**The school community develops meaningful and engaging practices, activities, and norms that promote social and civic responsibilities and a commitment to social justice.** ■ Students and staff model culturally responsive and ethical behavior; ■ Relationships among and between staff and students are mutually respectful, supportive, ethical and civil; and ■ Students and staff are actively engaged in celebrating milestones and accomplishments as they work to achieve meaningful school and community life.

For additional indicators and sub-indicators for each standard, see source footnote.
Source: National School Climate Center[72]

In addition to the five standards and accompanying indicators, NSCC also lists major indicators of the 13 dimensions of school climate assessed by the CSCI. As the Appendix figure shows, these indicators may further serve to guide school climate improvement initiatives and inform school climate goals.

IMPROVEMENT PROCESS

NSCC recommends that a school climate coach (SCC) lead the development and implementation of a "comprehensive school-wide strategy to promote positive school climate." [73] The SCC, typically appointed by the school principal, plays a central role in facilitating communication and collaboration among district and school staff, community members, parents, and students to develop and implement a school-level climate improvement strategy. NCSS notes that principals may create a separate position for the SCC or appoint a school counselor or teacher with an overlapping role with the SCC (e.g., positive

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[72] Figure standard descriptions and indicators quoted verbatim from: Ibid., pp. 4–8.

[73] For a detailed description of the various roles and responsibilities, see: "Roles and Responsibilities: Building Positive Schools Climate and Providing Learning Supports for Students." National School Climate Center. http://www.schoolclimate.org/climate/documents/role_responsibilities.pdf

behavioral interventions and supports or safety coordinator).[74] Figure 3.2 below lists a selection of the common responsibilities of a SCC.

Figure 3.2: Partial Responsibilities of a School Climate Coach

- Provides the structure and accountability for the development and coordination of services and activities within each school aimed at improving school climate and addressing barriers to learning
- Consults with the school's support personnel such as the school counselor, psychologist, social worker, behavior specialist, etc. to assess the needs of students and to ensure that students who are at-risk and/or experiencing issues are receiving appropriate school- and community-based services
- Collects information about from multiple sources and stakeholders about the school environment including perceptions of relationships, students' and school personnel's needs to inform the school improvement process and the provision of services
- Collaboratively develops a comprehensive intervention plan tailored to the school's needs that promotes the used of evidence-based programs and practices and that can be directly connected to the school's improvement plan
- Provides in-service training to school staff on positive youth development, school climate, and specific student behavioral problems

Source: National School Climate Center[75]

A school climate leadership team, organized by the SCC, should lead a multi-stage, cyclical school climate improvement process. This team may include teachers, school leadership, other school-based staff, students, parents, and community members, all of who collectively manage a five-stage, continual improvement process focused on the evaluation, interpretation, and use of data from school climate evaluations, as illustrated in Figure 3.3 below. Please note that after each stage, NCSS recommends that the school climate leadership team reflect on completed work to foster future improvement.[76]

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[74] Ibid., p. 2.
[75] Bullets quoted verbatim from: Ibid., pp. 2–3.
[76] "Stages, Tasks and Challenges." National School Climate Center.
    http://www.schoolclimate.org/climate/stages_tasks_challenges.php

Figure 3.3: Cyclical School Climate Improvement Process Stages

Stage One: Preparation and Planning

- Forming a representative school climate improvement leadership team and establishing ground rules collaboratively.
- Building support and fostering "Buy In" for the school climate improvement process.
- Establishing a "no fault" framework and promoting a culture of trust.
- Ensuring your team has adequate resources to support the process.
- Celebrating successes and building on past efforts.

Stage Two: Evaluation

- Systematically evaluating the school's strengths, needs and weaknesses with any number of school climate as well as other potential measurement tools.
- Developing plans to share evaluation findings with the school community.

Stage Three: Understanding the Findings, Engagement & Developing an Action Plan

- Understanding the evaluation findings.
- Digging into the findings to understand areas of consensus and discrepancy in order to promote learning and engagement.
- Prioritizing Goals.
- Researching best practices and evidence-based instructional and systemic programs and efforts.
- Developing an action plan.

Stage Four: Implementing the Action Plan

- Coordinating evidence-based pedagogic and systemic efforts designed to (a) promote students' social, emotional and civic as well as intellectual competencies; and (b) improve the school climate by working toward a safe, caring, participatory and responsive school community.
- The instructional and/or school-wide efforts are instituted with fidelity, monitored and there is an ongoing attempt to learn from successes and challenges.
- The adults who teach and learn with students work to further their own social, emotional and civic learning.

Stage Five: Reevaluation and Development of the Next Phase

- Reevaluating the school's strengths and challenges.
- Discovering what has changed and how.
- Discovering what has most helped and hindered further the school climate improvement process.
- Revising plans to improve the school climate.

Source: National School Climate Center[77]

DATA-BASED IMPROVEMENT

NSCC recommends that school climate leadership teams establish procedures for using school climate data to set, monitor, and adapt school climate goals and implementation strategies. Specifically, NSCC offers the following suggestions:[78]

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[77] Figure text quoted verbatim from: Ibid.
[78] Bullets quoted verbatim from: "Guiding Principles: A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline,"
Op. cit., pp. 4–7.

- School, family, community, and youth leaders establish procedures for using school climate findings (including disaggregated data) to establish instructional and/or school-wide improvement goals and implementation strategies that will enhance student learning and positive youth development.

- Accountability measures and data are used and monitored that directly demonstrate the impact of efforts to promote social, emotional, ethical and civic learning.

- School leaders monitor and evaluate the prevention and intervention strategies designed to support people feeling welcomed, supported and safe and use that data to improve relevant policies, practices, facilities, staff competencies, and accountability.

Similarly, in a 2014 resource guide for improving school climate and discipline, the U.S. DOE states that **schools should "use proactive, data-driven, and continuous efforts, including gathering feedback from families, students, teachers, and school personnel to prevent, identify, reduce, and eliminate discriminatory discipline and unintended consequences."[79]** This report, which considers school climate efforts and school discipline policies as overlapping, specifically recommends that schools monitor any school-based law enforcement officer program "to ensure that the program is meeting school safety goals." This may involve comprehensive data collection and review "on officer activity, including, if appropriate, data on any school-based arrests, citations, searches, and referrals."[80] The U.S. DOE is particularly concerned with the disproportionate impact of suspensions and expulsions on minority and special education students. Disaggregated data collection allows schools to monitor disciplinary actions by student subgroup and target existing inequalities. In cases where data indicates inequitable enforcement of discipline policies, school leadership should "evaluate the root causes of the problem and create a plan to address the issue."[81]

ADDITIONAL BEST PRACTICES

In its 2014 resource guide, the U.S. DOE identifies three principles for guiding district and school leaders through the school climate evaluation and improvement process. Districts, schools, and school climate leadership should: [82]

- Create positive climates and focus on prevention;

- Develop clear, appropriate, and consistent expectations and consequences to address disruptive student behaviors; and

- Ensure fairness, equity, and continuous improvement.

The U.S. DOE emphasizes the improvement of school climate as a preventative measure that reduces the number of students involved in disciplinary actions. Figure 3.4 below displays the six action steps recommended by the U.S. DOE to foster positive school climates.

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[79] Ibid., p. 4.
[80] Ibid., p. 11.
[81] Ibid., p. i-4.
[82] Bullets quoted verbatim from: Ibid., p. 1.

Figure 3.4: Action Steps for Fostering Positive School Climates

- Engage in deliberate efforts to create positive school climates.
- Prioritize the use of evidence-based prevention strategies, such as tiered supports.
- Promote social and emotional learning.
- Provide regular training and supports to all school personnel.
- Collaborate with local agencies and other stakeholders.
- Ensure that any school-based law enforcement officers' roles focus on improving school safety and reducing inappropriate referrals to law enforcement.

Source: U.S. Department of Education[83]

Similarly, the American Federal of Teachers (AFT) highlights the importance of multi-tiered behavioral support systems, curricula that incorporate social and emotional learning (SEL), and bullying prevention policies in creating and sustaining a positive school climate.[84] A multi-tiered support system such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) serves to engage the whole school through a SEL-supported curriculum. More targeted group-based approaches may include "peer mediation, intervention, peer mentoring, restitution, peer juries and peace circles," while counseling and community-based services may support individual students with more severe behavioral and developmental needs. In addition to explicit bullying prevention policies, the AFT further recommends that students take an active part in maintaining their school environment. For example, by assigning school maintenance duties (e.g., wiping the board daily), teachers can help create a collective responsibility for students to care for the school and their peers. Involving students and parents in the school climate improvement process can also foster student engagement and investment in promoting a positive school climate.[85]

The U.S. DOE also emphasizes the importance of equitable and consistent discipline policies on school climate improvement. As the U.S. DOE states:[86]

> A critical component of a strong and positive school climate is a school-wide discipline policy that sets high expectations for behavior; provides clear, developmentally appropriate, and proportional consequences for misbehavior; and uses disciplinary incidents to help students learn from their mistakes, improve their behavior, and meet high expectations.

To create a positive school climate for all students, the U.S. DOE stresses that **schools and districts should ensure that discipline policies are enforced equitably across all students**, "without regard to a student's personal characteristics, including, race, color, national origin,

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[83] Figure bullets quoted verbatim from: Ibid.

[84] "Creating a Positive School Climate." American Federation of Teachers. pp. 2–3. http://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/schoolclimate_web.pdf

[85] Ashley, D. "It's About Relationships: Creating Positive School Climates." *American Educator*, Winter -2016 2015. pp. 2–4. http://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/ae_winter2015ashley.pdf

[86] Quoted verbatim from: "Guiding Principles: A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline," Op. cit., p. 3.

religion, disability, ethnicity, sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, or status as an English language learner, migrant, or homeless student."[87]

However, the AFT voices caution against the use of a zero-tolerance discipline policy, which often leads to high rates of suspension and expulsion and subsequently disrupts student learning and increases the likelihood that disciplined students would engage in negative behavior. Instead, the AFT recommends restorative practices that "encourage students to understand the impact of their behavior, take responsibility for their actions, repair the harm they have done, and mend relationships with students and teachers." The AFT cites the example of West Philadelphia High School, whose school suspensions decreased by 52 percent following the implementation of restorative practices.[88]

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[87] Ibid., p. 4.
[88] "Creating a Positive School Climate," Op. cit., p. 2.

APPENDIX

Figure A: Dimensions and Indicators of School Climate

DIMENSION	SUB-DIMENSION	MAJOR INDICATORS
Safety	Rules and Norms	Clearly communicated rules about physical violence; clearly communicated rules about verbal abuse, harassment, and teasing; clear and consistent enforcement and norms for adult intervention.
	Sense of Physical Security	Sense that students and adults feel safe from physical harm in the school.
	Sense of Social-Emotional Security	Sense that students feel safe from verbal abuse, teasing, and exclusion.
Teaching and Learning	Support for Learning	Use of supportive teaching practices, such as: encouragement and constructive feedback; varied opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and skills; support for risk-taking and independent thinking; atmosphere conducive to dialog and questioning; academic challenge; and individual attention.
	Social and Civic Learning	Support for the development of social and civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions including: effective listening, conflict resolution, self-reflection and emotional regulation, empathy, personal responsibility, and ethical decision making.
Interpersonal Relationships	Respect for Diversity	Mutual respect for individual differences (e.g. gender, race, culture, etc.) at all levels of the school—student-student; adult-student; adult-adult and overall norms for tolerance.
	Social Support – Adults	Pattern of supportive and caring adult relationships for students, including high expectations for students' success, willingness to listen to students and to get to know them as individuals, and personal concern for students' problems.
	Social Support - Students	Pattern of supportive peer relationships for students, including: friendships for socializing, for problems, for academic help, and for new students.
Institutional Environment	School Connectedness/ Engagement	Positive identification with the school and norms for broad participation in school life for students, staff, and families.
	Physical Surroundings	Cleanliness, order, and appeal of facilities and adequate resources and materials.
Social Media	Social Media	Sense that students feel safe from physical harm, verbal abuse/teasing, gossip, and exclusion when online or on electronic devices (for example, Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms, by an email, text messaging, posting photo/video, etc.).
Staff Only	Leadership	Administration that creates and communicates a clear vision, and is accessible to and supportive of school staff and staff development.
	Professional Relationships	Positive attitudes and relationships among school staff that support effectively working and learning together.

Source: National School Climate Center[89]

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[89] Figure text quoted verbatim from: "The 12 Dimensions of School Climate Measured," Op. cit.

PROJECT EVALUATION FORM

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